



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Pacific
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Region

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Secretary Mike Chrisman
California Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Secretary Chrisman:

We appreciate your letter of March 15, 2006 expressing your concerns regarding certain land designations in the Land Management Plans for the Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres and San Bernardino National Forests in Southern California. These Land Management Plans set forth a zoning designation developed through an extensive public process to meet the current and projected future needs of stakeholders. Notwithstanding these zoning designations, however, I want to reaffirm the commitment we made to protect Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) throughout the Pacific Southwest Region.

In a letter to you from former Regional Forester Jack Blackwell, dated January 27, 2005, we gave assurances to California that the Forest Service would follow the guidance from the Interim Directive 1920-2004-1, until a final roadless rule was completed for California. Interim Directive 1920-2004-1 has now been extended to July 16, 2007, per Interim Directive 1920-2006-1. By way of background, the Interim Directive provides that IRAs shall generally be managed to preserve their roadless characteristics. Among other things, it allows for the road construction or reconstruction projects described in Section 1925.04b.1 of the Interim Directive (decisions delegated to the Regional Forester), but does not allow other types of road construction or reconstruction in IRAs, unless approved by the Chief. The requirement that the Chief must approve any road construction or reconstruction project not described in Section 1925.04b.1 of the Interim Directive terminates when a forest-scale roads analysis is completed and incorporated into each forest plan. Such an analysis has been completed for most of the 18 national forests in California, and therefore that portion of the Interim Directive no longer applies to those forests. Nevertheless, in light of our agreement with California, we still intend to follow the guidance in the Interim Directive 1920-2004-1, as further amended by the four changes in your letter, until a final roadless rule for California has been completed.

Our January 27th letter also expressed our support for the four changes you proposed for the protection of truly roadless areas in your letter of January 24, 2005. Your changes are listed below and we remain in support of each.

1. The USFS Chief should have no greater discretion than the Regional Forester or Forest Supervisor in approving or disapproving road construction or reconstruction in inventoried roadless areas.



2. Maps of IRAs need to be updated and shared with the State to confirm that the maps accurately reflect current conditions.
3. Where roads exist in IRAs, we must conduct thoughtful, common sense-based reviews of whether those roads should be actively managed or decommissioned. For example, roads that provide access for Native American Tribes to widely acknowledged sacred sites or meet legitimate public safety objectives or well-managed recreational use should be actively managed. Roads that cannot be managed to mitigate sedimentation in sensitive watersheds should be decommissioned.
4. Roadless status limitations should not compromise our fire fighting efforts consistent with existing authority.

At the conclusion of this letter, we also committed to "developing a roadless rule that fully protects roadless values at least as successfully as the Interim Directive and in a fashion that meets the State's goals for the protection of wild areas in California." We believe that the final rule (adopted May 13, 2005) provides for a state petition process that will, when complete, fulfill this commitment.

Let me assure you that we intend to honor these commitments. We intend to work closely with California throughout the petition process for roadless area management in California until a final rule has been promulgated. And during the interim period, until the petition process is complete and a final rule promulgated, we intend to work with you on roadless area management in national forests in California as follows:

1. We will continue to respect the prohibition on road construction and re-construction set forth in the Interim Directive, as modified by the four changes in your letter, on all national forests in the Region, including those in southern California. Specifically, the Regional Forester: (i) will not authorize road construction or reconstruction projects in IRAs except for the road construction or reconstruction projects described in Section 1925.04b.1 of the Interim Directive (decisions delegated to the Regional Forester), as modified by the four changes in your letter; and (ii) will not recommend to the Chief a decision for any road construction or reconstruction project in an inventoried roadless area within the Chief's decision authority, which is described in Section 1925.04a, para. 1. By taking these steps, the Regional Forester can ensure that the USFS will not undertake any road construction or re-construction projects in IRAs in national forests in the Region, except as set forth in the Interim Directive, as modified by the four changes in your letter.
2. Prior to beginning our public scoping process for proposed roads in IRAs, and before we make key NEPA decisions, we will meet with your staff to ensure you agree that our decisions are consistent with the guidance in Interim Directive, as modified by your four changes.
3. If we cannot reach consensus at the staff level, I will meet with you personally to resolve outstanding issues and to ensure consistency with the guidance in Interim Directive, as modified by your four changes.

In addition to these measures, I am affirming our goal of no net increase in miles of roads in inventoried roadless areas within each national forest in California.

There are approximately 260,000 acres of National Forest IRAs in California managed by the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest of Region 4 and the Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest of Region 6. I have conferred with the Regional Foresters of Region 4 and Region 6 and they are in agreement with the commitments of this letter and will manage these lands in accordance with the measures outlined in this letter.

I hope that you will find our suggestions agreeable. We believe these measures will help protect roadless values as successfully as the Interim Directive (as modified by the four changes in your letter) until California's petition process is completed and a final rule is in place.

Sincerely,


BERNARD WEINGARDT
Regional Forester